CHAPTER TWO

LAS FIESTAS

"Volver, Volver, Volver"

> They buy the car, they buy it on time, they take it there [Jalos], and then a of lot of times they have to return it because they can't afford it. Sometimes the idea is simply to take a good car to make an impression, and they make arrangements with a dealer, but when they get back they have to return it because they don't have the money to pay for it.

The speaker is Lola Olmedo, a long-time resident of Turlock, commenting that to "volver"—to return to what one loves—is the dream of every young man from Jalos who has migrated. He wants to return home for the fiestas and impress everyone by showing how well he is doing in the United States. Lola joked that some people will even just borrow or rent a new car or truck as an emblem of their success.

Because of Jalos's rich religious history and traditions, three events in particular engender a strong village identity among current and former residents of the community. One is La Fiesta de La Virgen de la Asunción, honoring the Virgin of the Assumption as the patron saint of Jalos. The feast day of the Assumption of Mary is

August 15, and the fiesta centered around this day lasts for approximately two weeks, from August 1 to 17. Although primarily a religious festival, it is also an occasion for abundant food, parades, fireworks, drinking, and partying, and it offers an opportunity to "volver" to Jalos, to celebrate La Virgen, and to reunite with family and friends. The second event, Carnaval, takes place the week before Lent in February or early March and generally caters to young people, with day and night drinking, dancing, and partying. Both fiestas draw thousands of people, since *los ausentes* return in large numbers from the United States to visit family and friends and to renew their allegiance and identification with Jalos. Finally, many *ausentes* make yearly pilgrimages to Jalos to visit the shrine to El Padre Toribio, a Jalos native who is informally recognized as the patron saint of undocumented migrants.

Not all *ausentes* can attend the fiestas, of course. Significantly, starting in 2002, Turlock residents decided to hold their own celebration for the Virgen to accommodate those unable to travel to Jalos because of work, lack of money, illegal immigration status, or poor health. The Turlock celebration began as a small event but has grown tremendously in recent years. It differs from the Jalos fiesta because it is compressed into one or two days and because it is an exclusively religious celebration. It revolves around church and family, without the drinking, partying, or dating rituals associated with the Jalos celebration. The Turlock fiesta is a noteworthy example of circular migration and transculturation. It literally brings Jalos and its customs and traditions to Turlock, including visits to Turlock by priests from Jalos and the use of an exact replica of the Jalos statue of the Virgen.

LA VIRGEN DE LA ASUNCIÓN (VIRGIN OF THE ASSUMPTION)

On my first visit to Jalos, I attended a talk in the Jalostotitlán Cultural Center by a native of Jalos and an amateur historian of the area. The presentation was a narrative account of the colonial history of Jalostotitlán. According to the speaker, a Franciscan, Padre Segovia, had first led evangelist Franciscan fathers into the area and established a hospital called De la Limpia Concepción. Early in the town's history, La Virgen de la Expectación was the principal Virgen of Jalos. The Franciscans also constructed a church in 1623, La Parrochia del Divino Salvador. The Spaniards later established another church, La Parroquia de La Virgen de la Asunción, in 1679, and since then La Virgen de la Asunción has become the patron saint of Jalos.

Although the Spaniards introduced the Virgen de la Asunción to Jalos, shrines to her exist in churches throughout the world, including Spain, Colombia, Guatemala, the Netherlands, Russia, France, and Malaysia. Members of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Oriental Orthodox churches, as well as some Anglicans, believe that the Virgin Mary ascended bodily into heaven at the end of her life. Catholic Church dogma holds that Mary, "having completed the course of her earthly life was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory" (Pius XII 1950). Mary is the pledge of the fulfillment of Christ's promise. In a homily given at Lourdes, Pope John Paul II quoted Jesus' words to his disciples at the Last Supper (John 14:3) as one of the scriptural bases for the dogma of the Assumption of Mary: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you to myself; that where I am, you may be there also" (John Paul II 2004).

The Assumption of the Virgin Mary has been a subject of veneration, doctrine, art, and dogma for many centuries. In many countries the official feast day of August 15 is a Catholic holy day of obligation. It is the principal feast of the Blessed Virgin.

THE JALOS FIESTA FOR THE VIRGEN

I arrived in Jalos to begin the study without knowing anyone in the community, although I had obtained the name of a contact person, Professor Xavier Glass, through a mutual acquaintance. Once checked into my hotel, I headed out in search of him.[1] Ultimately we made phone contact, and he invited me and my fellow researcher to visit him at his home outside Jalos the next day.

It was soon apparent that he was both very knowledgeable about the history, political economy, culture, and customs of the area as well as very well-known and well-connected in the area. He spoke about the community at length and provided valuable

background information that has greatly facilitated this research. He confirmed the fact that most able-bodied men in the area migrate at some point to the United States and have been doing so for over a century.

On my initial trip I also spoke at length with Mr. López Rivera, the assistant to the municipal president (mayor) of Jalos. He, too, confirmed that people from Jalos are nearly everywhere in the United States, but are especially concentrated in California and Texas. In the 2000 Census the city of Jalos proper had a population of 28,100, but this is a gross undercount, he said, since it does not include people in the outlying areas of the municipio. (As indicated in chapter 1, the population reported for the entire municipality in this Census was a little over 53,000.) Furthermore, "if you counted the fiestas it would be double." He added that Jalos has reached a point where it has a permanent transnational population, in which half of the family is here and half in the United States.[2]

A goal of this study was to observe the August fiesta in Jalos, and there was much to see. Daily masses were held in honor of various groups such as the elderly, the sick or infirm, *los ausentes*, couples who were contemplating marriage, and *chóferes*, or truck and bus drivers. Parades celebrated Jalos and its history. There was a celebration of *camiones* and *trocas* (buses and trucks), in which vehicles drove slowly in front of the church and were blessed as they passed. Highlights of the fiesta included the firework displays held on several nights in front of the church of the Virgen de la Asunción near the main plaza, the Plaza de Armas, with music, entertainment, balloons, souvenirs, bread, hot *elotes* (corn on the cob), candy, ice cream, cotton candy, and hot cakes prepared outdoors on a portable grill. There was also a lot of activity at the Plaza de Armas throughout the day, including live music and entertainment, ice cream, candy, and balloons and toys for children. Several food vendors on the periphery of the plaza offered a wide assortment of food, including tacos and tortas. But for much of the time, especially during the day and the late afternoon, people simply relaxed on benches around the plaza or walked around the square in front of the church, talking and enjoying the sunshine, while children played on or around the *quiosco* (kiosk). It was in the evening that the entertainment and organized activities started, with music and entertainment in the main *quiosco* on the plaza. Evening also brought out many young people, who walked around the square, with the girls moving in a circle in one direction and the boys moving in the opposite direction. At the height of the celebration, it was virtually impossible to traverse the plaza because of the density of people who stood talking or watching the girls as they circled the plaza.

The highlight of the August fiesta occurred on August 15. The day started with the people of the parish gathering at the church at dawn to serenade the Virgen with "Las Mañanitas," the traditional Mexican birthday song. This was obviously a solemn and joyous occasion that was carefully planned and executed. In the afternoon, people gathered outside the church anxiously awaiting the Virgen's appearance. The statue of the Virgen was dressed in white and in great splendor for the occasion. It was carried by four ushers or *chambelanes* on scaffolding balanced on four large two-by-four planks. Preceding the statue of the Virgen were the parish priest, other dignitaries, and a band. People filed in behind the statue to form a large procession that was as wide as the street. They were greeted along the way by members of the community, who stood and watched from their balconies or on the sidewalks. More people joined in along the way. En route were little girls dressed as pretty angels. The procession began in front of the church, made a full circle for several miles around the town, and ended on a side street near where it had started. Throughout the procession, people sang and cheered for the Virgen, led by a group leader with a megaphone. The leader would give out a cheer, saying "dame una 'M'" (give me an "M"). Then "give me an 'A'" and so on until the cheerers had spelled out "MARIA." He then asked the crowd, "What does that spell?" And the crowd yelled out in unison, "María!" The leader repeated, "I can't hear you!" until the crowd became even more excited and yelled back loudly, "María! María! María!" The leader would then say, "Let's give her an applause!" and the crowd broke out into a warm and loud spontaneous applause for María. The cheering and yelling built up to a crescendo and frenzy. The frenzy was for La Virgen María, but people also seemed genuinely moved. Although I am not a devout Catholic or active in church affairs, I too found myself moved by the event. There were also songs to La Virgen María. The grand finale was a huge fireworks display held in the plaza in front of the church, followed by live musical entertainment that went on into the evening. The fireworks were resplendent, lighting up the

entire sky above the church. Although by now it was late in the evening, about 10:00 or 11:00 p.m., the event was clearly a family affair. Families gathered together to watch in awe. Younger children who did not have a clear view were hoisted on men's shoulders, and people took pictures or videotaped the event. When the fireworks ended and the smoke cleared, a beautifully formed image of the Virgen emerged in lights on a ferris wheel that had been filled with fireworks. After the fireworks display, the crowd was once again entertained by a band and later by mariachis playing traditional Mexican love songs far into the night.

THE TURLOCK FIESTA FOR THE VIRGEN

The fiesta for the Assumption of the Virgen in Jalos was a long-established tradition, but its much smaller counterpart across the border in Turlock was only in its sixth year at the time I observed it in 2007. It is a one- or two-day event, and most of the activities take place on the feast day, August 15.[3]

I had met and interviewed Dolores ("Lola") Olmedo in March earlier that year, along with her husband, Roberto ("Beto"), and a young priest from the Church of the Sacred Heart (El Sagrado Corazón), Father Gustavo León, who was originally from Aguascalientes. I spoke with the three of them in the rectory about how the Turlock fiesta originated. Señora Olmedo, a tall, red-haired woman who appeared to be in her forties, apparently came from a well-to-do, landed family in Jalos and is clearly a leader and a force in the Turlock community.

Lola explained that "the curate Miguel Ángel who was in Turlock at the time helped us. Our organization started in February of 2002 here in Turlock. A group of persons met and formed the Association of the Virgin of the Assumption, that's what it's called. Then every year we also celebrate the fiestas. We bring a priest from there, not necessarily born in Jalos but who has been in Jalos." She also told me that for their fiesta, they brought an image of the Virgen from Guadalajara to Turlock "que es identica a la que está en Jalos" (that is identical to the one in Jalos), and she seemed to take great pride in this fact.

Señora Lola said that most people in Turlock from Jalos socialize and get together, but, as she found in organizing the celebration to the Virgen, they can't always go back to Jalos because of work, children, or economic problems. All they can do is remember the Jalos fiesta and how nice it was. She felt that it was especially important for young people who could not travel to Jalos to have the opportunity to attend a similar celebration. Lola then extended a cordial invitation to me to attend the fiesta in August, adding that on the 15th it was going to include "Las Mañanitas" (Mexican birthday song) to the Virgen and mariachis. In addition to displaying the image of La Virgen, she said, that they were going to have Azteca *danzantes,* a *banda* (Western band), and *charros* (Mexican cowboys). Señora Lola added that the organizers have had great support from the local bishop and from Father Gustavo, and "thanks to the support of Father Gustavo we are going to have beer this year!" The three of them chuckled, because this was obviously a sensitive point. Father Gustavo laughed and said, "Oh, really?" (I would later learn that he was opposed to serving liquor at the fiesta.)

Lola explained in more detail how the Turlock celebration started. She said that she had talked to Father Miguel Ángel and told him how sad she was in August when she couldn't go to the Jalos fiesta. Her own family celebrated La Virgen daily and always attended the August fiestas, but sometimes she couldn't go. She asked, "Why don't you give us the opportunity of celebrating her here?" And he said, "Yes, by all means, go ahead." And this led to the organizing group.

The first year, she told me, they didn't celebrate with an image that was identical to the one in Jalos. They brought one that was smaller. But the next year they were able to collect money and obtain a statue from Guadalajara that was identical in appearance. It was created by one of the best sculptors in Mexico, she told me, although she could not recall his name at the time. The organizers "met with him and everything." And it all got started here, through donations and contributions. They have also held some *charreadas* (rodeos), which are 100-percent Mexican style (apparently to raise funds).

The parish church doesn't help financially in any way with the fiesta, Lola said, and so all of the funds have to be raised by the non-profit organizing association. The fiesta has gone very well, "Gracias

a Dios." Each year there are more people. The first year (2002) only thirty people participated, and this past year it was over four hundred. The Turlock fiesta is open to the public at large, and many people who do not come from Jalos participate. "We have a great deal of support from many persons who are not from Jalos," Lola commented.

Father Gustavo agreed that the fiestas had been a great success. During the interview, however, as we talked about the community in Jalos and Turlock, he said that alcohol was a problem in both cities. He noted that people from Jalisco do seem to drink a great deal, and this is more or less the custom. Alcohol was the cause of many infractions and problems with the law, and because of that he was opposed to selling beer at the fiesta. Señora Lola added that at the Jalos fiestas, "toman como si se fuera a terminar" (they drink as if it was going to run out). Father Gustavo said that the California drinking age of twenty-one helped.

A number of people whom I interviewed in both Turlock and Jalos agreed that drinking at the Jalos fiestas was excessive and problematic. One of the most vocal critics was Alma Castro, a catechism teacher at Sacred Heart who had been in the United States for about twenty years at the time I talked to her. She normally attends the August fiesta in Jalos and not Carnaval, she commented, but one of her brothers never misses Carnaval. He brought back a video taken this past year at Carnaval. "What I saw in the film [video] more than anything, the one my brother brought, it looks like they drink too much. I asked myself, am I going to let my son go? Perhaps he will want to go. . . . I wouldn't be able to let him go by himself. Go? No, because they sell [alcohol] in excess."

The day before the fiesta, I called Sacred Heart. The receptionist provided me with the fiesta schedule, with the reminder that the celebration would start the next day with Las Mañanitas para La Virgen (singing the traditional birthday song to La Virgen) at 6:00 a.m. This would be followed by the Rosary at 6:30 and mass at 7:00 a.m. by Father Mark, a young Anglo priest who seems to work closely with the community. I was up promptly at 5:15 a.m. and got to church just as the parishioners were singing Las Mañanitas. The church was only about three-quarters full. The mariachis in the pews looked like they might be parishioners and were dressed in street clothes with black pants and white shirts. The sense of devotion to La Virgen was overwhelming and something that one could feel more than one could put into words.[4] Anyway, there she was, the statue on the altar, dressed in a beautiful blue dress. During the mass, Father Mark smiled broadly, described how he had dressed up (he had a buttoned white shirt and a bolo tie), and commented on how dressed up and beautiful "Our Mother" was. (Father Mark has sandy, reddish hair, is about six foot tall, extremely thin, and looks as if the map of Ireland were painted on his face.)

One would not have to be very observant to notice several things about the celebration mass. First, it was extremely personal and intimate. Second, it was evident that the celebration was organized and led more by parishioners than by the parish priests. Finally, it was clear that women, and specifically Lola Olmedo, were the leaders of the organizing committee. Mrs. Olmedo, a stately woman with an almost regal presence, stood at the end of the first row in the front facing the altar with a bell in her hand and rang it, saying in Spanish, "give me an 'M'"! "Give me an 'A'"! And at the end, "What does that spell?" and the crowd enthusiastically yelled out in unison, "MARIA!" After singing Las Mañanitas and a half dozen other songs to the Virgen, the congregation then prayed El Rosario (the Rosary) at about 6:30, followed by the mass.

At 8:00 a.m. we were quickly ushered out of the church because the English language mass would be starting soon. People were invited to move into the school cafeteria, where the celebration would continue with the mariachi. Señora Olmedo, Señora Rosaura López (whom I had interviewed in June, along with her husband Ramón), and other volunteers brought in several very large pink cake boxes filled with pan dulce, or Mexican sweet bread. I sat at one of the tables next to Señor López, who graciously gave me a religious card with a picture and prayer of El Padre Toribio as a gift. At first I thought he was only showing it to me, but then he said in Spanish, "No, no it's for you."[5] I recognized more people in the cafeteria as I sat there, some of whom I had interviewed on earlier visits and some whom I may have simply seen in either Turlock or Jalos.

I had contacted Socorro López, Mr. and Mrs. López's youngest daughter, a couple of days before arriving in Turlock on this trip. Socorro is a very pleasant, twenty-five-year-old social worker who works for Child Protective Services. I told her that I planned to observe the fiesta and also hoped to arrange a focus group interview of

young people. Once I arrived, Socorro emailed me that she would be in the church parking lot at about 5:00 p.m. on August 15 with her nieces, who are sixteen and seventeen, and who told her they could help set up a focus group of young people whose families are from Jalos. Socorro and her nieces were in charge of bringing the helium and balloons for the afternoon and evening celebration. I arrived at the church at about 4:30 p.m., where I was able not only to see the organizers of the celebration, including Lola and Beto Olmedo, the Lópezes, Juan ("Cheno") González and some of his children, brothers, and cousins, and other early settlers from Jalos, but also to participate in the process.

One of the men had a pickup truck, and the task at hand was to carry the statue of the Virgen out of the church, put it on the truck, and then drive to the street behind the church and church school, which is in front of a small park. The men had constructed a scaffold made of two-by-fours, which they inserted into a double wooden base on which the statute of the Virgen rested. It was a massive base that added to the already heavy statute. As noted above, this statue was an exact replica of the statue in Jalos, a point of great pride to the Turlock parish.

Getting the Virgen out of the church and onto the pickup turned out to be an ordeal. The men had to bear the heavy weight while stooping low to avoid hitting the Virgen's crown on the top of the doorway. With about a half a dozen men, we were finally able to accomplish the task successfully. The men then drove the pickup to the back of the church school and waited for people to arrive.

Socorro and her nieces by then had arrived in the parking lot. Socorro had rented a tank of helium gas, and she and her nieces were busy inflating the balloons, tying them, putting strings on them, and handing them out to children and people who would be in the procession. There was some confusion over where the procession was to start. Socorro's understanding was that it would start in the church parking lot because that was what was announced in the English version of the church bulletin. But the Spanish version of the bulletin stated that it would begin in the street in front of the school, so we all moved in this direction, where people were gathering behind the pickup with the Virgen. The street was gated, but the gates were opened for the *charros* or Mexican cowboys and their horse trailers. The horses were beautiful and danced to the music. I had a sense

that this was a very united community, like the feeling I had earlier when I first met the members of the large López family. The hierarchy between members of the organizing committee and everyone else also remained clear. Lola Olmedo, who is related to the González family, was the center of the entire event, but Cheno González and some of his brothers and cousins also played an important role, as did the López family.

Despite the excitement, the busy street scene seemed a bit dangerous to me. There were cars, pickups, the young girls preparing the balloons, and horses in the middle of the street, with many other people and children nearby. I spoke to Pedro López, one of the older López children, and he said he didn't like situations like this because he has seen horses go crazy, and slip, especially on asphalt. He said that he has witnessed some ugly situations. When the procession finally started, Mrs. Olmedo was about ten to fifteen feet behind the statue of the Virgen, near the sidewalk. Again, just as in the church that morning, she was like an Evangelical cheerleader, blurting out with great gusto, "Give me an 'M'!" "Give me an 'A'!", and so on. Later on during the procession, the crowd sang songs to the Virgen again, and finally, near the end, prayers were said, including El Padre Nuestro (Our Father) and several Santa Marías (Hail Marys). The procession was inspirational and moving. The people walked for over an hour in various neighborhoods and were led in prayer by Padre Mateo, a priest from Jalos. The procession also included music for the Virgen, a *banda* (band), and mariachis.

An important difference I observed in this procession, compared to Jalos, was the lack of an audience. In Jalos people lined the streets and sat in windows and balconies to watch the procession. The streets were decorated, with little girls dressed as angels along the way. Here, we walked in a nice, old Anglo residential neighborhood without a single person coming out to cheer or to greet us. I wondered whether we had any audience for the procession. It wasn't until we returned to the church that the people who had not walked but were waiting for us warmly greeted us with applause and broad smiles. Notably, Mrs. Olmedo remained in a leadership role. Finally, I noticed that the procession was self-consciously egalitarian and incorporated both men and women. Four men initially carried the statue of the Virgen. It was propped on two-by-fours and placed on boards on the men's shoulders, who carried it like pallbearers. The

ends of the boards were wrapped with tape and cushioning material to protect their shoulders. A young man, who appeared to be Lola's son, went through the crowd and recruited volunteers to relieve the persons carrying the statue. It was impressive because the carriers began alternating between a team of men and, then a team of women.[6] And the parishioners were visibly honored and excited to participate in the procession. It was clearly an honor to be asked to carry the statue of the Virgen.

Surprisingly, when the procession returned to the church, it was packed. Most of the people who were in the procession had to stand at the back. There was an excitement in the air that is hard to describe. The mass started with a group of about a dozen Azteca dancers, both boys and girls, ranging from teenagers of about seventeen or eighteen years old to little children who could not have been more than five or six, perhaps even as young as four. They danced rhythmically to the beat of a huge drum. Their detailed outfits were beautiful, with long hairpieces and peacock feathers, reflecting Jalos's indigenous past. The dancers also wore *cascabeles* (shells) on their legs. I was surprised by the fact that the dancers continued to dance for about twenty minutes. After they exited, the statue of the Virgen entered triumphantly through the front doors and was greeted with a great round of applause and clapping. The atmosphere was not so much solemn and respectful as enthusiastic and dramatic, and reminiscent of a crowd at a major sporting event. The noise was deafening. The officiating priest was Father Mateo, who had come from Jalos for the celebration. He was a tall, distinguished-looking, middle-aged man who could have easily passed for a CEO of a major company and who had led us in prayer during the procession.[7]

CARNAVAL IN JALOS

As described at the start of this chapter, Jalostotitlán celebrates both the fiesta to the Virgen and Carnaval. The latter takes place the week before Lent, lasts from a week to ten days, and generally caters to young people, with continuous drinking, dancing, and partying. It is best described as a marathon party. This is in marked contrast to the celebration to the Virgen, which has a strong religious focus and broader appeal to families and older people. Both events, as already noted, draw thousands of people, including *los ausentes* who return from the United States. During the fiesta to the Virgen there is even a mass and a *desfile* (parade or procession) specifically in honor of *los ausentes*. In fact, an entire day is set aside to honor the people who have left the community to work in the United States. There is also a picnic for the entire community on a ranch outside of Jalos.

The Jalos fiestas, especially Carnaval, are known throughout Mexico not only because they are festive times but also because of the renowned beauty of the local women, which is celebrated especially during Carnaval. Carnaval includes a beauty pageant to select Señorita Jalostotitlán; *corridas de toros* (bullfights); *palenque*, or entertainment by leading singers and entertainers such as Juan Gabriel, John Sebastian, Pepe Aguilar, and Vicente Fernández; "Teatro del Pueblo," which brings theater productions to the community; Jalos *béisbol* (baseball); and a *charreada* or Mexican rodeo. On my last visit to Carnaval, the entertainment included a couple of groups from the 1960s and '70s: "Los Hermanos Guirón" and "Los Freddies," as well as Pepe Aguilar. A Jalos blog announced a recent Carnaval in Jalos as follows:

> Everything is set for the selection of a representative of Jalos's beauty on February 19th . . . the selection of Ms. Jalos [will be] at approximately 8:30 p.m. in the monumental Fermín Espinoza Armillita bull ring. The event is free, but the tickets will be collected in the lower part of the bull ring, which has been reserved for the family and invitees of the Presidency. The four candidates for the Jalos title are Mariela, Cindy, Yareli and Cristina, and entertainment will be provided by Playa Limbo and the group Wrong Direction from the city of Aguascalientes. . . . Much luck to each of the contestants, and we hope the best one wins so that she can represent us with dignity in the forthcoming events. (February 18, 2009, http://limonnetjalos.wordpress.com)

The atmosphere is rather like Carnaval in Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans, except that people do not dress in fancy costumes or wear masks and disguises. Carnaval has several important ingredients: food, liquor, music, dancing, and love. Numerous *puestos* or food stands sell a wide variety of dishes and *antojitos*, or snacks. Liquor is even more important, especially beer, and is plentiful. People,

especially young people, drink not only at bars and restaurants but also in the plaza and on public streets. It is not uncommon to see people, including underage teenagers, drinking in their cars, trucks, and SUVs or while walking along the sidewalk. I noticed on my visit that one of the drug stores on the plaza had set up a cooler filled with cold beer on the sidewalk, at its entrance, so that people could readily purchase beer without having to go into the establishment. Popular modes of transportation for young people include open-air jeeps, which can be rented and used to travel around town, and ATVs, used for driving around town or on the sand dunes near the Jalos River, outside of town.

One of the highlights of Carnaval is a competition among the *banda* groups that come from throughout Mexico. Like the baby chicks dyed in different colors that are for sale during Carnaval, the band members are dressed in brightly colored red, blue, green, yellow, purple, or orange uniforms. Most of the activity takes place in and around the Plaza de Armas. The food and drink are located around the perimeter of the plaza and on the adjoining streets. Chairs and tables in front of the *puestos* are occupied by groups of family or friends. The bands are to be seen everywhere, not only in the plaza but also on the streets of Jalos.

At this particular Carnaval, attractive young women dressed in miniskirts set up a stand at the edge of the plaza, giving out free samples of tequila made by a popular brand of tequila to passersbys, including young people. Couples dance and drink throughout the plaza and the surrounding area, and they often hire a musical group or *banda* to play for them for a specified period of time. Young couples also dance in the *quiosco* in the middle of the square. One band will often engage in a face-off competition with other bands, and some of them play throughout the night and into the morning.[8]

LOS AUSENTES AND THE FIESTAS

One focus of the interviews for this study was on how *los ausentes* viewed the Jalos fiestas. Most people with whom I spoke in Turlock had a very positive view of the fiestas, particularly the fiesta for the Virgen, whether they were able to attend or not. Those least able to

attend were undocumented persons with young children and the elderly or infirm. In past years, workers would go back and forth between Jalos and the United States with ease, spending part of the year in Turlock during the harvest season and returning to Jalos for the rest of the year. With greater border enforcement, this migration pattern has become increasingly difficult.

Cheno González, who was born in Jalos and came to Turlock in 1964, said that his children like Jalos and that the family tries to visit Jalos almost every year, especially for the fiestas. For several years they didn't go because he did not want his children to miss school, but now that the children are older and out of school they can go again as a family.

Alma Castro, the Sacred Heart catechism teacher, was born in Jalos and came to Turlock when she was in her early twenties. She described the Jalos fiesta for the Virgen as *muy bonitas* (very beautiful). Alma has four children, and she noted that her oldest daughter, who is eighteen, loves Jalos and is intrigued by the fiestas and the old-fashioned dating customs. Her daughter gets along well with young people from Jalos, she said, and has even participated in the *noviazgo* or dating rituals there. Her daughter also feels that she has more freedom there than in Turlock, because she can easily go out with her friends to the plaza or to eat some shrimp, tortas, or tacos.

Dora Méndez, who sells homemade potato chips and *chicharrones* (fried pork rinds) outside Sacred Heart after mass, has been in the United States eighteen years and goes back to Jalos at least twice yearly. She originally came here illegally but now has her "papers." She doesn't go for Carnaval, but she visits in December and sometimes for Mother's Day in May, as well as for the August fiestas every year. She also said that her children like Jalos and get along well with children from there.

Ofelia and Manuel Ruiz are typical of the people who would like to go back to Jalos for the fiestas but cannot, because they are undocumented and have small children. They have been living in Turlock for about eight years, and their two children are ages five and ten. Manuel works as a *fiador* (feeder) at a dairy outside Turlock. The couple said that in Jalos they used to go to the fiestas every year, and Ofelia once went back with the children for about five months when her mother was sick. The Ruizes would like very much

to continue to go back to visit, but, as Manuel said, "Sí podemos ir. ¿pero luego para regresar?" (Yes, we can go. But what about returning?). It would be far too risky.

Whether or not *los ausentes* are able to return to the fiestas in Jalos, it is evident that the celebration in Turlock has helped them to establish or maintain a strong religious, social, and cultural bond to Mexico. I was touched by the fact that in recreating the fiesta, the first order of business for the Turlock organization was to buy a replica of the statue in Jalos. I was also impressed by the pride that people took in having an exact replica. This pride reinforces the religious importance and solemnity of the celebration. The full inclusion of women and children in the celebration also reinforced the idea that the celebration was a family event, as did the banning of alcoholic drinks. Because the celebration extends out to the entire Mexican community of Turlock, it serves not only to intensify identification with Jalos but also to solidify the local Mexicano community, which includes people who are not from Jalos.

Father Mauricio, a Colombian priest at the Sacred Heart parish whom I interviewed on one of my more recent visits to Turlock for the August fiesta, commented on how impressed he was by the active involvement of the first and second generation in the celebration to the Virgen in Turlock and by the way in which parents were passing on their customs and traditions to their children. Moreover, the Turlock celebration signals a new trend in the Mexicanization of the United States and transnationalism, in that is represents a form of reverse assimilation of Mexican culture. It brings Jalos rituals and traditions to the United States and passes on the faith, given that non-Mexican Catholics have begun to participate in the celebration. Sadly, however, there are no fireworks to honor La Virgen or light up the beautiful Turlock sky.

RELIGION: ASSIMILATION AND ADAPTATION OR CULTURAL RETENTION?

Conventional wisdom in the study of assimilation of immigrant groups is that religion has been largely a source of integration and assimilation into American society, since many ethnic groups have

found it necessary either to reaffirm their religious roots or to find new ones (Portes and Rumbaut 2006, 301). Charles Hirschman has summarized the social functions played by religion for immigrants as the "three Rs," referring to refuge, respect, and resources (Hirschman 2004). According to Portes and Rumbaut, the first function refers to the early stage of arrival and resettlement, where the church becomes a source of comfort, protection, and support; the second is concerned with anomie and the loss of normative orientation and sense of self-worth; and the last refers to Weber's theory regarding the economic consequences of religious affiliation (Portes and Rumbaut 2006, 301).

Some observers, however, maintain that the Catholic Church has not generally been supportive of Mexican migrants and argue that the Mexican experience does not conform to the "three R" functions of religion for immigrant adaptation (Portes and Rumbaut 2006, 332). Sociologist David López, for example, states adamantly that "the Church may or may not be successful in its attempts to secure the loyalty of its flock but, in contrast to the religious institutions that serve many other contemporary immigrant communities, it is contributing little to the integration and upward mobility of Mexican and other Latino immigrants in the United States" (López 2008, 71).

In reassessing the role of religion in the adaptation of Mexican immigrants in the United States, it is necessary to make two important distinctions. First, rather than conflating church and religion, as is often done, it is important to distinguish between the role that the Catholic Church has played and the role of religion itself. Second, it is similarly important to distinguish between formal and popular religion.

The Catholic Church, as David López notes, has undoubtedly done little to promote the integration of Mexicans and other Latinos in the United States. In both Mexico and the United States, the Church from the time of the Spanish Conquest to the present has been a source of oppression and exploitation. Religion, particularly popular religion, on the other hand, has been a source of inspiration and liberation both in Latino America and the United States. As I have observed elsewhere, "Although religion has typically worked to facilitate oppression and exploitation, it has occasionally worked for

freedom and liberation of people of Mexican descent" (Mirandé 1985, 114).

According to Orlando Espín, culture is primarily the way that humans construct and reveal themselves to others and to themselves as meaningful human beings, and "nothing human is *a*cultural" (Espín 2006, 4). The existence of popular Catholicism is now an unquestioned fact, and popular Catholic religion "embodies and epistemologically connects these daily relationships and symbolically expresses their connections to/with the broader social networks—including the sacred networks—through the rites, beliefs, and experiences of the people's religion" (Espín 2006, 6).

María Pilar Aquino has identified three reasons for the centrality of popular Catholicism in Latino/a theology. First, "popular catholicism is the most distinguishing, most pervasive, and omnipresent reality in the religious life of *Catholic* Latino/a and Latin American communities" (Aquino 1999, 34). Second, popular Catholicism is a religion. It is a religion of "those treated as subaltern by both society and Church in the United States" (Orlando Espín, quoted in Aquino 1999, 34). Finally, these popular expressions "are the ultimate foundation of the people's innermost being and the common expression of the collective soul of the people" (Virgilio Elizondo, quoted in Aquino 1999, 34), and so Latino/a popular Catholicism represents a theoretical discourse that connects and relates the community's religious life to "lo cotidiano" (the daily life) of its members (Aquino 1999, 34).

Devotion to the Virgen de Guadalupe and her indigenous precursor, Tonantzín, and the veneration of numerous Vírgenes and saints, such as Padre Toribio, are an essential part of Mexican popular religion. Although religion continues to play a central role in the life of Jalos migrants to Turlock, ironically, it has served more importantly as a mechanism for retaining people's identity with their ancestral homeland of Jalostotitlán. This has not occurred through the institutional church as much as through a popular Catholicism that links the community's life to "la vida cotidiana," or the daily existence of Jalos migrants.

In my interview with Father Mauricio at Sacred Heart, he told me that three thousand children in all have attended the Spanish catechism classes at the parish. Father Mauricio acknowledged that only a handful of Latino/a children were enrolled in the parish school, but he maintained that this was for financial reasons, in that most Mexican parents could not afford the tuition, and was not the result of discrimination. Several people with whom I spoke, however, mentioned that although things had improved recently, there has been a long history of discrimination against Spanish-speaking persons in the parish. For many years the masses were conducted in English only, there were no Spanish-speaking priests, and it was difficult for the Spanish-speaking parishioners to obtain a room for their meetings at the church. More recently, Alma Castro told me that although there are many more children in the Spanish catechism instruction than ever before, there is still favoritism in the treatment of the teachers and students in the English catechism program.

Although the parish church has "permitted" parishioners to celebrate the feast of the Virgen de La Asunción in Turlock, the parish itself does not provide any funding or support for the event. The celebration is organized by the "Comité for the Virgen de La Asunción" and funded completely by private donations. It is clear, in this particular example, that while the Catholic Church has done little to support or assist residents in their adaptation to the United States or to promote the success and upward mobility of Mexican migrants, the ideology surrounding popular Catholicism and the informal networks established by Jalos migrants within the parish have served as a form of social capital and aided adaptation and successful transition to life on this side of the border. Many of the people interviewed mentioned the unity and sense of *convivencia* (mutual sharing and harmony) that exists among people from Jalos at Sacred Heart and also, in general, how social networks established in the parish were critical in promoting their economic success and upward mobility.